

# Bear in Mind

An electronic newsletter from Bear Threads Ltd.

Volume 6 – Issue 9 October 2014

## From The Editor –

What beautiful weather the fall brings with beautiful warm days and crisp cool mornings. As I write this in mid September, I am already noticing a few fall harvest and Halloween decorations appearing on lawns and doors! Near our home the corn maze attractions are already open and there are pumpkins galore.

We have a fabulous issue for you this month. I am so thrilled to have Beth Bryson as our guests to dispel the myth that Heirloom sewing is for babies only!!! These are absolutely beautiful dresses, and I love the ideas she has of them being used again for weddings and for Christening gowns. By the way, Montgomery is not the only town which embraces this tradition. In Memphis, TN the Hutchison School also has this tradition along with flower girl attendants. And I am sure there are other schools of whom I am unaware, that do so as well.

I hope you enjoy my article on *Fibers, Fabrics and Finishes*. This is a frequent subject of questions from many of you, so I hope some of the mystery is removed. I welcome any further questions to our website or mail address, and I will promise to answer them in future issues.

So, as the Brits say, grab a cuppa and enjoy the latest issue.....

Happy Stitching,

Sheila

## Meet the Designer – Beth Bryson

Beth's Heirloom Sewing is located in Wetumpka, Alabama which is in the central part of the state, approximately 10 miles north of Montgomery. The shop has been open 9 years and is the area's largest store for supplies relating to heirloom sewing and boutique children's clothing. There is a large selection of laces, trims and fabrics to choose from, as well as hand dyed tatting in soft pastel colors, as well as patterns. For those wishing to sew non-heirloom garments, the shop has a large selection of fashion fabrics as well as classics, trims and patterns. The display of constructed garments is a plethora of ideas to get your creative thinking started.

Classes are available at the shop as well as a website for those to live too far away to visit. The website, [Bethsheirloomsewing.com](http://Bethsheirloomsewing.com) was launched this past year and new items are being added all the time. You can even sign up for classes on it.

Beth Bryson owns the shop and has four very talented employees who work for her. Beth has two sons and two grandsons. She says, "I started heirloom sewing when my niece was born 22 years ago. She outgrew it but I did not." She loves all aspects of it but constructing baby gowns and baby garments are her favorite. Her desire is to serve her customers and assist them in creating garments for their children. Sewing is a happy hobby and she loves for her customers to leave happy and excited about what they are going to make with their purchase!

# Southern Traditions

By Beth Bryson

There is a long standing tradition at the private schools in Montgomery, Alabama where the girls who are graduating wear heirloom style dresses for their baccalaureate service, graduation ceremony and their senior portraits. Many of these girls wore heirloom dresses as children and a large number of them were made by either their mother or grandmother.

Since heirloom style dress patterns are practically non-existent for girls this age, the process begins with selecting a commercial pattern with the style bodice they like. There are many times more than one pattern is needed to incorporate desires for the front and back of the dress. Each girl has their own ideas of what they want and the seamstress takes the patterns and adapts them to heirloom sewing styles. The girls then begin the process of working with their seamstress to choose fabrics, lace and trims and

design the dress. In most cases, ecru lace and white Swiss batiste is chosen for the dress. Swiss trims, tating, pin tucks, hand embroidery, puffing and ribbon are all incorporated a well.

Some of the dresses are worn for the one occasion but many will be used at future college functions or by younger siblings. There are a few who later use parts and pieces of the dresses in christening gowns for their children. Most of the dresses are floor length but could be shortened and worn at their wedding rehearsal or as the dress they wear when leaving their wedding.





I took the dress I made for my niece when she graduated and made a christening gown for her future children. During the initial planning for the graduation dress, I made the skirt so that I could remove the bottom lace bands and use the dress skirt as the skirt for the gown. I re-cut the sleeves and used them and removed the lace from the bodice of the original dress and used it for the bodice on the gown.

This is such a wonderful way to use heirloom sewing for older girls and to create an heirloom for them as they take the next step in their life!



# Fibers, Fabrics and Finishes

## *A Closer Look!*

Over the years I have been asked by most of you –“Just why are the Swiss fabrics so absolutely beautiful? They take a twill weave and make it look like silk!” The simple answer is the finishing of the fabric – but not so quick! Let’s start at the beginning and that is with the fibers. Don’t worry as, I promise, you will not need a textile PHD to understand this article.

### FIBER –

Fabric is made of yarn which is made of fibers. There are two basic types of fiber – manmade and natural. Natural fibers come from plants or animals and examples are cotton, wool, linen, ramie (yes, ramie is a natural fiber coming from the ramie plant) and silk. Manmade fibers are just that – they come from chemicals in a factory! Each kind of fiber has its’ own characteristics, therefore each type of fabric has its’ own characteristics. Fabrics can be made of blends of fibers mixing two natural fibers, two manmade fibers, or two or more from each category. (Repeating from a previous article: “Any natural fiber blend, that is a fabric woven from two natural fibers, will not wrinkle as much as a fabric woven from only one natural fiber.”) With regards to the characteristics of the various fibers primary concerns include durability, wrinkle resistance, absorbency, and care. Other considerations are appearance or ‘hand’, colorfastness, drape, wrinkling, pilling and static build-up.

### FABRIC –

Fabric can be woven, knitted – where the fabric is made by interlocking loops of yarn, - or non-woven, meaning made by matting or binding fibers together.

### FINISHES –

A fabric finish is applied to a fabric once it has been made to improve on any one or more of it’s’ characteristics. Perhaps you wish to:

Improve the appearance of color, pattern or sheen.

Change the texture by embossing, brushing or smoothing.

Improve the feel – softer, crisper, firmer, etc.

Improve the drape.

Improve wearing qualities – crease resistance, stain resistance, flammability, or waterproof.

Modify care requirements such as easy wash, drying times, shrinkage, etc.

With modern technology there is practically a ‘finish for every fabric’! Finishes include physical, chemical, biological and even coated, as in laminates. Bear Threads Swiss fabrics are finished using several different methods of both physical (mechanical finishing) and chemical finishing.

Let’s learn about the finishes your wonderful Swiss fabrics do have:

### **MECHANICAL –**

In **brushing** the fabric is passed through wire rollers which brush the fabric to leave it soft and fluffy. **Calendering** is the process of passing the fabric through heated rollers which press the surface of the fabric to compact it giving it a shine. **Embossing** is the result of the fabric being passed through engraved rollers which press a relief pattern into the fabric. **Shrinkage** occurs when the fabric is steamed and placed over a vibrating conveyor belt. **Gassing** is the process of burning off protruding fibers from yarns and cloths by passing them over a gas flame or heated copper plates. This gives the fabric a smooth surface which is very necessary for fabrics to be printed, and for those where a very smooth, inviting hand is desired. This is also sometimes called singeing.

### **CHEMICAL –**

There are numerous chemical finishes that provide everything from **flame proofing**, **water proofing**, **stain resistance**, **easy care**, **anti static**, **moth proofing** and **anti felting** (which is applied to wool to keep it from pilling). Most of the above mentioned chemical finishes are not permanent and may only last through two or three washings. However, examples of Bear Threads fabrics which have a permanent chemical finish are voile, lawn and organdy. Note the ‘water’ marking on the voile and organdy which is a result of the method by which the chemical finish is applied. As well, our lawn has a chemical finish which gives it a wonderful crispness and allows it to hold pleats so well. The most common chemical finish which you have no doubt heard of is **mercerizing**. Most often you see this term on spools of thread. Here, a sodium hydroxide solution is added to fibers while they are stretched. This makes the cotton stronger, smoother and shinier. This is a permanent change.

## ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL

Whether you are sewing for baby or toddler boys, animals are always popular. How can Dad say no to a cute giraffe, hippopotamus, monkey or elephant. Today jungle themes are abundant in décor and gift items for adults, and are popular for nurseries as well. They lend themselves to bright and primary colors, as well as the neutral and natural palettes. Here are some ideas to personalize your little tyke's wardrobe. Smaller motifs can be sewn

onto collars or pockets. Larger motifs and insertions can be featured on rompers, John-Johns and even denim overalls. With cooler weather around the corner, a cute animal motif can be sewn onto a classic sweater for a whimsical look to pair with corduroy. Many can be combined with animal print fabrics for a colorful and bright look. Now your little boy will find morning dressing to be fun, fanciful and he will begin to discover the animal kingdom as well!



Visit us on the web at [www.bearthreadsLtd.com](http://www.bearthreadsLtd.com)

To place an order contact us at 404-255-5083 or 404-255-4001 fax

"Bear in Mind" articles are available on our website. Encourage your customers to check out our website for information and inspiration.